



CRS Report for Congress

Zimbabwe: Election Chronology

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Summary

This chronology, which begins in January 2002, covers events surrounding the presidential election that took place in Zimbabwe on March 9-11, 2002. It will not be updated. For further information on Zimbabwe, see CRS Report RL31229, *Zimbabwe Background*.

Introduction

A presidential election was held in Zimbabwe, a country of some 11.3 million people in south-central Africa, on March 9-11, 2002. President Robert Mugabe of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) faced opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai (pronounced Changerai) of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the vote, which was marked by considerable controversy and violence. For background on Zimbabwe, including its history and politics as well as the conflict over land ownership, see CRS Report RL31229, *Zimbabwe Background*.

Chronology

03/24/2002 – Press reports indicated that since the Zimbabwe election, 338 additional white-owned farms had been listed for takeover. The head of the Amani Trust, a human rights organization, asserted that 10,000 to 30,000 Zimbabweans had fled their homes as ZANU-PF supporters sought revenge against backers of the MDC. Hundreds of MDC supporters had reportedly fled Gokwe region in central Zimbabwe after their homes had been set on fire.

— The head of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Zimbabwe was quoted as saying that 600,000 Zimbabweans were in dire need of food due to the economic downturn and worsening drought.

03/22/2002 – The largely-white Commercial Farmers Union reported that 25 farmers had been assaulted and 50 evicted from their land since the election.

03/21/2002 – A three-day general strike called by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions fizzled in its second day as Zimbabweans returned to work. Some workers and businesses had observed the strike, declared illegal by the government, on its first day.

03/20/2002 – Morgan Tsvangirai was formally charged with treason and ordered to surrender his passport and deeds to property. U.S. State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher said the charges against Tsvangirai were “an example, the latest example, of the kind of retaliation against opposition and supporters that we’re seeing under way in the aftermath of the election. War veterans, ruling party militia, (and) farm squatters are carrying out widespread retribution against commercial farmers, their workers, polling agents and other opposition supporters.”

03/19/02 – White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said the United States was continuing its conversations with allies about the proper response to the “fraudulent election in Zimbabwe,” noting that the President wanted to be “certain that no decision be rushed.” Fleischer added that the President was disappointed that some African nations “were willing to turn a blind eye to what happened in Zimbabwe.”

- A Commonwealth committee empowered to determine Commonwealth policy toward the Zimbabwe election announced that Zimbabwe would be suspended from Commonwealth membership for one year. The committee consisted of the presidents of South Africa and Nigeria and the prime minister of Australia.

- The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum reported that 35 people had been killed in political violence and 453 tortured since the start of the year. (The Zimbabwe police had reported 16 politically motivated killings as of March 7.) For the period March 1-15, the Forum listed numerous incidents of violence, most involving attacks by ZANU-PF supporters on the MDC. Some MDC attacks on ZANU-PF backers were listed as well.

03/18/2002 – Farmer Terry Ford was tied up, run over, and shot at his farm west of Harare. Ford was the tenth white farmer to be killed since the beginning of the land takeover crisis in 2000.

03/17/2002 – President Robert Mugabe was sworn into office for another 6-year term.

03/16/2002 – European Union leaders condemned the Zimbabwe elections, saying “they cannot be judged as either free or fair.”

03/15/2002 – President Mugabe signed into law the restrictive media bill that had been passed by parliament on January 31 (see below).

03/14/2002 – The U.S. Department of State issued a “fact sheet” on the initial findings of the U.S. embassy team that observed the Zimbabwe elections. The team reported that it had confirmed many of the “numerous reports from the last two years detailing government intimidation, violence, and electoral manipulation.” ZANU-PF youths, often with the assistance of police, had resorted to a violent campaign of intimidation to deny the MDC access to rallies and polling places, according to the team, and the

government had created chaos in urban areas by reducing the number of polling places by more than half.

- The 42-member Commonwealth observer group issued an interim report finding that “the conditions in Zimbabwe did not adequately allow for a free expression of will by the electors.” The report found that a “high level of violence and intimidation” had preceded the poll, creating a “climate of fear.” Moreover, thousands of Zimbabweans had been prevented from voting.

03/13-14/2002 – Press reports recorded several expressions of support for the Zimbabwe elections from African leaders and observers. The observer team from the Organization of African United (OAU) described the vote as “legitimate, free, and fair,” and observers from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) reached a similar conclusion. The South African team said “elections should be considered legitimate,” while Namibian observers said the vote was “watertight.” President Daniel arap Moi of Kenya told Mugabe that the outcome was “testimony of the confidence and high esteem the people of Zimbabwe hold in you.” (*AllAfrica.com*, March 14, 2002.)

03/13/2002 – President Bush told a press conference that “We do not recognize the outcome of the (Zimbabwe) election because we think it’s flawed. And we are dealing with – and we are dealing with our friends to figure out how to deal with this flawed election.”

- Secretary of State Colin Powell issued a statement criticizing the “sustained, government-orchestrated campaign of intimidation and violence” before the Zimbabwe election and affirmed that the election was “neither free nor fair.” Powell said the United States would consult closely with other governments on “appropriate responses.” Walter Kansteiner, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, issued a statement from Pretoria, South Africa, listing shortcomings in the Zimbabwe elections and calling them “a tragedy for the people of Zimbabwe.” Kansteiner added that “the worst may still be ahead.”

- President Mugabe was officially declared the winner of the March 9-11 election. Hundreds of young supporters celebrated in the streets of Harare, the capital, chanting support for Mugabe’s plan to redistribute white-owned farm land. Opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai said the vote was “the biggest election fraud I have ever witnessed.” (*New York Times*, March 14, 2002.)

03/12/2002 – The U.S. Department of State formally protested as “harassment” the March 11 detention of four U.S. diplomats seeking to observe the election in Chinoyi, north of Harare. The four were held for five hours.

03/10/2002 – A Zimbabwe high court judge ordered voting extended to a third day due to overcrowding at urban polling places. (Reports on March 11 indicated that the additional day of voting was marked by considerable confusion, with many voters unaware of the extension and some polling places failing to open, or opening only briefly.)

- 03/09/2002 – High voter turnout overwhelmed polling places in and around Harare, and several clashes were reported between riot police and voters angered by delays.
- 03/07/2002 – Commonwealth heads of state, meeting in Coolumberr, Australia, expressed “deep concern” about the violence and intimidation occurring in Zimbabwe but delayed a decision on any sanctions. Police cut short a meeting between Tsvangirai and foreign diplomats at a Harare hotel on grounds that the gathering had not been approved in advance.
- 03/06/2002 – It was reported that President Mugabe, overturning a Supreme Court decision, had issued a decree that, among other provisions, required voters to prove residency in their constituency before voting. The requirement was interpreted as making it more difficult for urban voters to cast ballots.
- 02/28/2003 – Walter Kansteiner, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, told the House Africa Subcommittee that Zimbabwe’s declining economy and political instability were “taking a toll on southern Africa as a region, discouraging foreign investment, creating the potential for a refugee crisis, and reducing trade within the region.” Kansteiner added that despite the campaign of repression in Zimbabwe, it was still possible that the people of Zimbabwe would “vote with such conviction and in such numbers” as to produce a “meaningful result.”
- 02/27/2002 – The Zimbabwe Supreme Court ruled that a law denying Zimbabweans living overseas the opportunity to vote was unconstitutional. (President Mugabe later reimposed the ban.)
- 02/26/2002 – The General Secretary of the MDC, Welshman Ncube, and Renson Gasela, an MDC member of parliament, were arrested on treason charges in an alleged plot to assassinate President Mugabe. (Ncube was formally charged on March 12.)
- President Mugabe criticized the United States, saying “they want to defend Tsvangirai.” Mugabe asked rhetorically, “Did we interfere with presidential elections in Florida? No, we didn’t. So why should America want to interfere in our elections?” (*Agence France Presse*, February 26, 2002.) Mugabe portrayed Tsvangirai as a representative of white interests. (*New York Times*, February 27, 2002.) Opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai charged that 79 MDC rallies had been disrupted by the police or ordered cancelled on short notice under the Public Order and Security Act.
- 02/25/2002 – MDC presidential candidate Morgan Tsvangirai was summoned to police headquarters in Harare, Zimbabwe’s capital, and notified that he was being charged with planning the assassination of President Robert Mugabe. Tsvangirai told a press conference “Of course, I denied that completely.” U.S. State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher said that “We are aware of no convincing evidence that there is any basis for these allegations (against Tsvangirai). It just appears to be another tragic example of President Mugabe’s increasingly authoritarian rule....”
- 02/22/2002 - President Bush issued a proclamation banning entry into the United States of “senior members of the government of Robert Mugabe or other Zimbabwe nationals who formulate, implement, or benefit from policies that undermine or injure

Zimbabwe's democratic institutions or impede the transition to a multi-party democracy." The ban also applied to persons who, through business dealings, derive significant benefit from anti-democratic policies in Zimbabwe.

- 02/21/02 – President Mugabe, on his 78th birthday, told a rally that he would not be deterred by European targeted sanctions. "What will I be wanting in Europe?" the President said. "We can visit other countries in Asia and Africa." (*BBC*, February 21, 2002.)
- U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan said that the Zimbabwe elections were a critical test of democracy in Africa and urged both the government and the opposition to put the interests of the country ahead of any individual interests. Annan appealed to the Zimbabwe government to "let the people make their choice, and to live by it."
- 02/20/2002 – Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa criticized European Union sanctions against Zimbabwe as "neo-colonialism and economic colonialism." (*Agence France Presse*, February 20, 2002.)
- 02/19/2002 – State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said that the United States was "moving rapidly" toward implementing targeted sanctions, particularly travel sanctions, against the Mugabe government. The presidential election in Zimbabwe would have a "major bearing" on whether additional sanctions were imposed, according to Boucher.
- 02/18/2002 – The European Union voted to impose "targeted sanctions" on the Mugabe regime, including a ban on travel to Europe by President Mugabe and nineteen aides, a freeze on any assets held in Europe by the twenty regime leaders, and a ban on the sale of arms and dual use equipment that could be used for repressive purposes. In addition, European elections observers were pulled out of Zimbabwe. Mugabe supporters hurled stones at the Harare headquarters of the opposition MDC.
- 02/17/2002 – Zimbabwe expelled Pierre Schori of Sweden, who headed the European Union's team of elections observers. President Mugabe had called Schori "dishonest and crookish," and had said that he would not accept observers from six European countries: Britain, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. (*Agence France Presse*, February 17, 2002.)
- 02/15/2002 – Police broke up a pro-democracy demonstration in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital, by the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA). The NCA advocates a new Zimbabwe constitution, including separation of powers and a ten-year term limit for the president.
- 02/13/2002 – News reports appeared of a video purporting to show Zimbabwe opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai discussing the possible assassination of President Robert Mugabe. (The term "elimination" was mentioned in the video, but not "assassination.") The video was allegedly made during a Tsvangirai meeting with a political consulting firm, Dickens and Madson, in Montreal. Tsvangirai charged that the video, which was later shown repeatedly by state-owned television in Zimbabwe, was a "total fabrication" and a "crude smear." (*Daily Telegraph*, London, February 15, 2002.)

- 02/08/2002 – The Zimbabwe *Independent* reported that ZANU-PF militants were systematically stealing the identity cards of MDC members. Zimbabweans were required to carry the cards under the new Public Order and Security Act and would not be able to vote without them.
- 02/07/2002 – Senator Russell Feingold's office indicated that the Zimbabwe government had cancelled a visa that had been issued to the Senator, who chairs the Africa Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. (*Associated Press*, February 7, 2002.)
- 02/04/2002 – The European Union (EU) said it would not impose sanctions on Zimbabwe, since the Mugabe government was permitting an initial core team of observers into the country.
- According to a press report, opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai told a rally in Mutare, in eastern Zimbabwe, that if elected, he would plan an orderly withdrawal from the Congo war, "where our men are dying and our dollars are being wasted." (*The Guardian*, London, February 4, 2002.)
- 01/31/2002 – The Zimbabwe parliament passed a controversial new law, proposed by the government, imposing new restrictions on the press. Under the law, Zimbabwe reporters would be required to seek accreditation from a government-appointed panel, and foreign reporters would be allowed to work in Zimbabwe only for limited periods. However, provisions that would have given Information Minister Jonathan Moyo sweeping powers were modified by parliamentary critics of the bill.
- 01/30/2002 – The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), meeting in London, expressed its "deep concern" over the continued violence in Zimbabwe. The CMAG called on President Mugabe to allow free electoral campaigning, but rejected an Australian move, backed by Britain, to expel Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth.
- 01/22/2002 – The Public Order and Security Act, passed by parliament on January 10, became law after President Mugabe gave his assent. The Act made it illegal to undermine the authority of the president or engender hostility toward him or to hold a public gathering without giving police four days notice. The law also required all Zimbabweans to carry an identity document.
- 01/14/2002 – A Southern African Development Community (SADC) summit, meeting in Blantyre, Malawi, issued a communique welcoming President Mugabe's assurances that the March elections would be free and fair.
- 01/09/2002 – The Zimbabwe Defense Force commander, General Vitalis Zinavashe (alternative spelling: "Zvinavashe"), with other top commanders and security officials, hinted at a coup should President Mugabe lose the March election. The commanders said they were responsible for defending the values of the 1972-1980 war against white minority rule and would "not accept, let alone support or salute, anyone who has a different agenda that threatens the very existence of our sovereignty, our country, and our people." (*New York Times*, January 11, 2002.)